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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 25 November 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. MUTERAHEJERU

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(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant

Iceland

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GE.93-19601 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS (agenda item 4) (continued):

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT

Initial report of Iceland (E/1990/5/Add.6 and Add.14; HRI/CORE/1/Add.26)

At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Ólafsdóttir, Mr. Helgason, Mrs. Pálsdóttir, Ms. Helgadóttir and Mr. Kristinsson (Iceland) took places at the Committee table.

1. Mr. HELGASON (Iceland) informed the members of the Committee that they would find in document E/1990/5/Add.14 the answers to most of the questions they had raised in document E/C.12/1993/WP.10 (list of issues to be taken up in connection with the consideration of the initial report of Iceland on articles 1 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/1990/5/Add.6)). Issues Nos. 1 to 6 of that list, for instance, had been dealt with in paragraphs 1 to 66 of document E/1990/5/Add.14. With regard to issue No. 6, it should be pointed out that the reports had been prepared by the Ministry of Health and Social Security, the Ministry of Culture and Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, under the coordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

2. Issues Nos. 7 (a) and 7 (b) were dealt with respectively in paragraphs 67 to 73 and 74 to 79 of that supplementary report.

3. Mrs. PÁLSDÓTTIR (Iceland) said that the following should be added to the information regarding protection against unemployment given in paragraphs 31 to 38 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6).

4. Under Act No. 93/1993, all unemployed workers were entitled to unemployment benefits paid by the Unemployment Insurance Fund, whether or not they were members of trade unions, provided that they had worked for a minimum of 425 hours in the previous 12 months. However, employees entitled to unemployment benefits on the basis of special legislation - mainly State and municipal employees - were not eligible for Unemployment Insurance Fund benefits.

5. The amount of the daily allowance varied from IKR 535 to 2,141 according to the number of hours worked during the previous 12 months. To that should be added IKR 86 per day for each child under 18. The Unemployment Insurance Fund also paid the employee contribution to the pension fund of which the worker was a member. The allowance was paid for a maximum of 260 days or 52 weeks, 5 days a week. There was a minimum waiting period of 16 weeks before a new benefit period could start. The unemployed worker could, however, shorten or eliminate the waiting period by attending a training course to enhance his chances of finding work again.

6. Twenty-five per cent of the unemployment insurance was financed by a tax on wages and 75 per cent by the Treasury, which had to increase its contribution if the Unemployment Insurance Fund could not cover its obligations.

7. Since 1 October 1993, the self-employed were also entitled to unemployment benefits if they fulfilled certain criteria.

8. The following should be added to the information given in paragraphs 143 and 144 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.6).

9. The Parliament was currently drafting a new social security act that would conform to the European Community guidelines on the subject and the act should be adopted before Christmas 1993.

10. Under the current legislation, social security insurance was divided into pension insurance, health insurance and work-related accident insurance, all three of which were administered by the State Social Security Institute.

11. A large number of wage-earners received, in addition to a social security pension, a supplementary pension from special pension funds, most of which had been established by law or by collective agreements. Since 1981, membership in a pension scheme was compulsory for all wage-earners over the age of 16. Contributions to the supplementary pension schemes were as a rule 10 per cent of the basic salary, 6 per cent of which was paid by the employer and 4 per cent by the employee.

12. All persons over the age of 67 living in Iceland, with an income below a certain level received old-age pensions.

13. All persons between the ages of 16 and 67 whose working capacity was reduced by at least 75 per cent were entitled to invalidity benefits. The need was individually assessed in the case of persons whose working capacity was reduced by 50 to 75 per cent and in the case of disabled children under 16.

14. Those whose annual income other than an old-age or invalidity pension fell below a certain amount received a pension supplement.

15. With regard to maternity benefits, mothers resident in Iceland were entitled to a parental allowance for six months after each birth, whether they worked or not. Parents resident in Iceland at the time of the birth of a child were entitled to a per diem parental benefit for the next six months. A full per diem benefit was paid to those who had worked between 1,032 and 2,064 hours in the 12 months prior to the birth. Half per diem benefits were paid to those who had worked between 516 and 1,031 hours per day. Only the mother was eligible for the benefit in the first month following the birth, but afterwards the father could succeed her as beneficiary.

16. All residents of Iceland were covered by health insurance. Most health care was free of charge. Patients must, however, pay a small part of the cost of home visits, specialists' consultations and certain medicines.

17. All employees were covered by work-related accident insurance, as were the self-employed unless they voluntarily exempted themselves. The pension and work-related accident insurance schemes under social security were financed both by a tax on wages and by direct contributions from the Treasury.

18. The following should be added to the information given in paragraphs 139 and 140 of the supplementary report (E/1990/5/Add.14).

19. All residents of Iceland were entitled to the best health care that could be provided to ensure their physical and mental well-being. They could receive such care either at home or in health care centres in the case of primary health care or in specialized hospital units.

20. Ms. HELGADÓTTIR (Iceland), referring to the right to the benefits of scientific progress and its applications (E/1990/5/Add.14, para. 231), said that in September 1993 her Government had approved a new declaration on scientific research policy, in which it had undertaken to allocate more funds to scientific research and link it more closely to its economic and cultural policies. The Government, industry and research institutions would work together to carry out the scientific research policy.

21. The National Science Council and the National Research Council would be combined into one organization. A working group composed of representatives of different ministries would prepare a programme of work and a draft budget for a three-year period. Greater emphasis ought to be given to research in higher education. Firms should be given more opportunity to participate in research, and stronger ties should be established between industry, research institutes and educational institutions. Lastly, Iceland should cooperate more extensively in international research.

22. Mrs. PÁLSDÓTTIR (Iceland), referring to issue No. 7 (b) of the list of issues, concerning measures aimed at guaranteeing the exercise of the rights under articles 6 to 15 of the Covenant without discrimination of any kind, said that in the spring of 1993, the Parliament had adopted a law on administrative procedure which would enter into force on 1 January 1994. The law codified several of the unwritten principles concerning equal treatment in the administrative area. It laid down the rule of equality between parties, the right to protest a measure and the duty to investigate. Administration employees were currently taking an intensive introductory course on the legislation.

23. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), referring also to issue No. 7 (b), said that all workers in Iceland were covered by a collective agreement or by article 5 of Act No. 69/1993, according to which the main organizations of the social partners should agree through collective agreements specifically on minimum wages and working conditions irrespective of sex, race, nationality or length of service, which would apply to all wage-earners in the sector and region covered by such an agreement. Any agreements concluded individually between workers and employers setting less advantageous wages or working conditions would be null and void.

24. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to put questions to the Icelandic delegation on the information just given.

25. Mr. SIMMA observed that the Icelandic delegation had provided clear and comprehensive information on the principles according to which human rights agreements were implemented. He would nevertheless like to know more about the impact of the Covenant on the country's domestic legislation. Did certain laws take the provisions of the Covenant into account and did the obligations arising from it play a role in the conception of domestic law? Iceland had provided more information on the implementation of the European conventions than of United Nations treaties; consequently, it would be interesting to know the impact of the European Social Charter in Iceland, in order to establish a parallel with the Covenant. For example, had the committee of independent experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Charter taken issue with certain institutions or policies in Iceland and, if so, what action had been taken in response to such observations?

26. The supplementary report (E/1990/5/Add.14) dealt at length with the legislative provisions establishing the equality of men and women and the fairly serious difficulties encountered in applying the principle, particularly with regard to equal pay (paras. 119 and following). Differences in pay depended on several factors: paragraph 122 offered a rather simplistic explanation for such differences, which were nevertheless appreciable, and he would like the Icelandic delegation to go more deeply into the question.

27. Some States had not even incorporated economic, social and cultural rights into their fundamental law. Paragraph 23 of the core document (HRI/CORE/1/Add.26) indicated that some provisions of the current Icelandic Constitution, especially those having to do with economic and civil rights, dated back to 1874, when the first Constitution had been adopted. It would be interesting to be apprised of the contents of provisions that went so far back.

28. Mr. BADAWI, referring to paragraphs 50 and 51 of the core document, noted that the Icelandic Ombudsman had in his reports called attention to the necessity of revising the human rights provisions of the Constitution. Had this opinion - which was of course not binding on the administrative authorities - prompted any action?

29. Mr. KOUZNETSOV asked, with regard to the legal force of international treaties, whether Icelandic nationals who took legal action against public officials could invoke the Covenant before a court in defence of their rights or whether it was possible to invoke only domestic laws or else European legislation.

30. Mr. ALVAREZ VITA noted that in Iceland international treaties did not assume the force of domestic law even when ratified, but rather were binding only in respect of international law (E/1990/5/Add.14, para. 54). Yet the Covenant was supposed to apply mainly at the domestic level, for otherwise it would remain essentially a dead letter. He therefore wondered whether there was any point in considering the report of Iceland, in view of the fact that the legislative provisions and measures it discussed had not been adopted with a view to carrying out the international obligations the State had contracted by virtue of the Covenant, but simply represented areas where domestic law and

international law coincided. He thought that question should be settled before the Committee and the representatives of Iceland went on with consideration of the report.

31. Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN said that she had been interested to read in paragraph 111 of the supplementary report (E/1990/5/Add.14) that it was forbidden for employers to discriminate in any way between their employees on the basis of their sex and that, if a complaint was lodged against an employer on account of an equal rights violation, it was the employer who must prove that his decision was based on other considerations. She would like to know how aware the women of Iceland were that equal rights was a principle the State had endorsed when it had ratified the Covenant, and how many women had lodged complaints on the grounds of discrimination because they were aware of their rights in the matter.

32. The CHAIRPERSON invited the representatives of Iceland to answer the questions asked orally by the experts.

33. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) said that he would answer the questions regarding equality between men and women when he addressed issue No. 7 (d). As for the areas where international treaties and domestic law coincided, there were two instances in which national legislation had been amended on the basis of an opinion of a treaty body. The governmental committee on the European Social Charter had taken the view that the provisions of article 5 of that instrument covered only the right to belong to a trade union, a view shared by the Icelandic authorities; the committee of independent experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Charter, on the other hand, had maintained that the article in question also covered the right not to belong to a trade union, and had concluded that Iceland's practice of paying unemployment benefits only to members of trade unions amounted to a form of pressure on workers to join such unions. The Icelandic authorities had deferred to the latter opinion and had amended their legislation, so that all now had a recognized right to unemployment benefits. Similarly, they had amended several articles of the Seafarers Act after an ILO committee of experts had indicated that the provisions reviewed were contrary to those of ILO Convention No. 105. As to the Covenant, he had no specific instance to cite.

34. Mrs. PÁLSDÓTTIR (Iceland) pointed out that a group of experts had been appointed by the Ministry of Justice to study the question of the legal force of international instruments in domestic law and it had recommended in a recent report that at least the European Social Charter should be formally incorporated into Icelandic law. She did not know the exact status of the Covenant, and asked for some time to obtain more information on the subject.

35. The CHAIRPERSON invited the representatives of Iceland to continue with the remaining issues to be considered.

36. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland), referring to issue No. 7 (c), said that all workers lawfully in Icelandic territory had the same benefits as Icelanders concerning wages, rest periods, holidays, and so on. They could also join trade unions.

37. Mrs. PÁLSDÓTTIR (Iceland) added that foreign workers with residence and work permits had the right to all social security benefits and access to health services on the same footing as nationals.

38. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) pointed out, with regard to equality between men and women (item 7 (d)), that complete equality of rights was guaranteed in domestic law and that progress had been made in the application of that principle, although some difficulties remained. Maternity leave had been extended to six months and in accordance with collective wage agreements was counted as part of length of service for purposes of assessing various benefits, provided the beneficiary had worked for the same employer for at least two years. In most cases, women employees had some measure of right to be absent from work when their children were ill, although that right took no account of the number of children or marital situation of the employee.

39. In the public sector, women holding positions of responsibility and trust were still in a minority. A plan of action submitted in 1986 had strongly emphasized the efforts State and local governments should take to make the number of women and men in public bodies as equal as possible. The Equal Status Act of 1985 also included a provision to the same effect. In recent years, the results had been fairly satisfactory, as the proportion of women on State boards, councils and committees, which had stood at 11 per cent between 1985 and 1987, had risen to 16.6 per cent in 1990. At the local level, the proportion of women had risen from 4 per cent in 1974 to 21.7 per cent in 1990 and during the same period, from 8.3 per cent to 32.4 per cent in the case of municipal councils. The figures were considerably lower in rural regions and significantly higher in the capital (women accounted for 45 per cent of the councillors on the Reykjavik City Council). With regard to Parliament, in the period from 1971 to 1993 there were only 3 women Members whereas there were currently 15 women MPs (24 per cent of the total).

40. A study comparing men's and women's wages in State employment had shown that in January 1992, the total wages of men were 48 per cent higher than those of women in an equivalent full-time position, as opposed to 45 per cent in 1989 and 50 per cent in 1987. The survey had also examined the proportion of additional payments in the wages of men and women (overtime, heavy workloads, work on committees and expenses), calculated as a proportion of the daytime wages for each equivalent full-time position. It had been noted that there was a vast difference between men and women in that respect, men receiving considerably higher payments than women in all sectors (78 per cent higher for overtime and 31 per cent higher in the case of workload payments). It could therefore be concluded that additional payments accounted for a relatively larger proportion of men's wages than those of women, with the same scales applying to both.

41. With regard to the application of the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), in 1992 the Icelandic Wage Investigation Committee had, on the basis of an agreement concluded on 1 May 1989 between the Icelandic Federation of Labour and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers and the City of Reykjavik, been made responsible for a comparative study of men's and women's wages and conditions of employment. The study, whose results had been published in 1992, had aimed, on the basis of data on the situation in 1990 of unskilled men and women workers, shop

assistants and office workers, to find out whether there were differences in the relative and absolute weekly pay of men and women, differences related to the nature of the occupation; whether hourly pay varied according to sex, residence, position and profession; whether differences in hourly pay varied according to occupation; and, finally, to determine the factors possibly influencing the hourly pay of men and women. It had emerged that the weekly pay of unskilled women workers was on average 39 per cent of that of unskilled male workers. Given men's longer hours of work, women's basic wages were 15 per cent of those of their male colleagues. Women's hourly pay was partly compensated by bonus payments, with the differences in actual hourly rates varying according to occupation, reaching up to 50 per cent for foremen as compared to their subordinates. In the fish processing industry, which was the main source of employment in Iceland, women's hourly pay was 1 per cent higher than that of men as a result of bonus payments. In the other sectors, unskilled women workers earned on average 7 per cent less than men.

42. Female shop assistants usually earned 42 per cent less than their male counterparts, the difference being attributable to the fact that men's hours of work were 50 per cent longer than those of women. On average, men's hourly pay was 24 per cent higher than that of women. Male shop assistants, taking into account the factors determining remuneration (age, place of residence, type of business and position within the firm), earned on average 27 per cent more than their women colleagues in shops in the capital and surrounding region, and 14 per cent more in shops in rural areas.

43. With regard to office work, women earned 37 per cent less than men, it being understood that men's hours of work were 17 per cent longer than those of women. On the basis of comparable hours of work, women in the sector earned 21 per cent less than men. Taking everything into account (age, geographical area, grade), women earned 20 per cent less than men.

44. The Icelandic Wage Investigation Committee had concluded that although there were differences between the pay of men and women working as shop assistants and office workers based on certain factors (age, occupation, grade and geographical area), other not inconsiderable differences had no justification. On the other hand, the differences in pay between unskilled men and women workers were due to the longer hours worked by men. The Committee had noted that when unskilled men and women workers worked the same number of hours there was no difference in pay, unlike the situation with regard to shop assistants whereby men, working the same number of hours as women earned 13 per cent more than their women colleagues, and male office workers who, under the same conditions, earned 21 per cent more than their women colleagues.

45. As a result of bonuses, unskilled women workers earned the same hourly wage as their male colleagues, their basic hourly wage standing at 16 per cent less than that of men.

46. Age and sex had a considerable influence, to the detriment of women, on the remuneration of shop assistants and office workers. There were no such negative influences in the case of unskilled men and women workers.

47. Unlike the situation of women shop assistants, office workers working either in the capital or rural areas were paid much less than their male colleagues.

48. Hourly wages were determined to some extent by the nature of the occupation, for example in the fish processing industry where men and women were subject to different pay regimes.

49. Differences in the wages of men and women were a potential impediment to equality in the home with regard to the division of household tasks and the rearing of children, and helped limit job opportunities for women.

50. In 1988, with a view to rectifying the situation, the Government of Iceland had decided, on the initiative of the Equal Status Council and the Ministry of Social Affairs that ministries and State institutions with more than 20 employees should set up four-year equal opportunity programmes for the period from 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1992. In September 1991, 42 State institutions had taken the prescribed measures, but most of the officers-in-charge had claimed that a number of difficulties related to tradition and beyond their control (educational and vocational choices, wage conditions for office work, division of labour regarding the care of children and the home) had prevented them from fully reaching the objectives laid down. The Interim Report of the Wage Investigation Committee had pointed out that the ministries which had carefully charted their objectives and how to achieve them had been the most successful; that demonstrated the need for equal opportunity programmes to be carefully worked out and rigorously implemented.

51. The Government of Iceland, which was deeply concerned at the disparities between men and women in respect of remuneration had adopted several programmes aimed at removing them and had sent reports to the ILO on the application of ILO Conventions Nos. 100 and 111.

52. With regard to restrictions on rights covered by articles 6 to 15 of the Covenant, in the area of employment, the Government had been forced to limit the right to strike on several occasions in the preceding 10 years because Iceland which was highly dependant on fishing resources and the export of seafood products, had recently had to face particularly high inflation and had therefore found it necessary to temper national expenditure as production fell to avoid an unmanageable trade deficit and thus operating losses and an increase in unemployment. The restrictions had, however, always been limited in time and tied to special measures to protect the purchasing power of the low-income groups.

53. Mr. SIMMA first of all praised the Icelandic delegation for such an open acknowledgement of the limited application of the Covenant by the public authorities, its precise replies to the technical questions raised by members of the Committee and the detailed explanations of the still considerable disparity between the wages of men and women.

54. With regard to the Government's restrictions on the right to strike, the ILO Committee of Experts had in one of its reports mentioned difficulties in industrial relations and the need to find common ground through negotiation, and had called on the Government of Iceland to give detailed information on

the measures which had been taken or had been planned to ensure optimum use of voluntary negotiating machinery between employers and workers' associations to avoid State intervention. It would be of interest to know if the Government planned to change the system in order to end its almost annual intervention.

55. Mr. KOUZNETSOV said that he was satisfied with the detailed information provided by the delegation of Iceland on the remuneration of men and women and asked how many complaints had been lodged with the courts concerning wage discrimination between the sexes.

56. Mr. TEXIER noted that the problem of inequality between men and women, which was an age-old problem throughout the world, was a matter of constant concern to the Icelandic authorities. With regard to the applicability of the Covenant, Iceland which had no body monitoring constitutionality (it was the responsibility of the judges) had adopted the legal doctrine whereby international treaties lacked the authority of internal law, even after they had been ratified. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that it had ratified a host of international instruments including the Covenants and basic United Nations and International Labour Organisation conventions and the main European instruments. Apparently, a committee had been made responsible for looking into the issue even though there was no basic contradiction between national legislation and the Covenants and one might therefore wonder whether it would not be appropriate to go ahead with constitutional reform.

57. To enable the courts to assess whether the State was applying the Covenant in full, it had first of all to be incorporated into domestic legislation or machinery had to be establish to apply it. Although regional conventions, such as the European Convention and the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights were beginning to be applied, in some countries, on the other hand, judges were seen to be somewhat reluctant to apply international conventions, including the Covenants. Nevertheless, some judges were now beginning to base their decisions on article 11 of the Covenant, on the right to housing, by, for example, refusing to rule in favour of evictions. The incorporation of international instruments into domestic legislation was of considerable practical interest as the rights they enshrined were increasingly considered to be individual rights which could be invoked in the courts. Therefore, it had to be possible for them to be invoked by bodies responsible for dispensing justice.

58. Mr. ALVAREZ VITA said that he was concerned at the absence of stopgap measures to improve opportunities for women on the labour market, despite the provisions of the Equal Status Act. Although the State had a role to play, society as a whole also needed to act and women themselves had to join in the fight to protect their rights. Legislation undoubtedly provided for equality between men and women but it was still necessary to ensure that such equality was put into practice. It was not enough for a country to have several women in top posts as was the case in Iceland; there had to be equality between the sexes at every level. As the provision of the Equal Status Act had not been applied, it was debatable whether the country's women's movements really played any active role. It would also have been useful to be given the name of the bodies which took part in drafting the report currently under consideration.

59. Mr. BADAWI asked for further details concerning the Women's List mentioned in paragraph 106 of Iceland's supplementary report (E/1990/5/Add.14).

60. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) expressed misgivings that the explanations he had given about the relations between the State and the social partners on the labour market might give an impression of excessive State intervention. It had to be understood that State intervention was prompted by economic considerations which were perfectly justified in the interests of Icelandic workers. The aim of all the Governments in power since the Second World War had always been to maintain full employment. The Icelandic economy, which was highly dependent on fishing, was particularly vulnerable to any fall in the price of fish, and on reduction in the size of catches. To guarantee full employment, the Government had to react very quickly to any drastic change in the overall economic climate using measures such as devaluation, the restriction of the right to strike or the temporary suspension of indexed-linked wages. A text had to be promulgated for each intervention, even if it simply involved, for example, shortening the duration of a measure. The volume of legislative instruments introduced in that area therefore gave the impression of frequent State intervention. In general, relations with trade unions were good and the Government had always worked in close cooperation with the leading trade union organizations, which had never repudiated even the restrictive measures taken to guarantee full employment. Admittedly, there had been some difficulties with lesser trade union organizations including the Federation of Academics in Service of the State which had lodged a complaint with the ILO Committee of Experts concerning the collective agreement reached between the two parties. In February 1993, the Government of Iceland had signed a new agreement which it was confident would resolve all the difficulties.

61. Equality between men and women was a priority for the Ministry of Social Affairs which for six years had been headed by a woman. A range of measures had already been taken including the promulgation in 1991 of the Law on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, which set up the Equal Rights Complaints Committee which could investigate wage issues. The Law worked on the principle that the burden of proof was on the employer. In 1992, the Committee had received 26 complaints, which were included in the reports Iceland submitted to the ILO on the status of the application of Conventions Nos. 100 and 111. Efforts had been made to publicize the Equal Rights Complaints Committee so that women could take advantage of an efficient means of recourse now available to them. An information pamphlet setting out the procedure for referral to the Committee had been published and courses organized by trade unions provided similar explanations.

62. Ms. HELGADOTTIR (Iceland) stated that the courts were not currently seized of any complaint concerning wage inequality but that two cases had arisen in the past. The first case which dated back to the end of the 1970s had concerned disparities in wages set for the same job in a collective agreement signed by a men's union and the wage set in an agreement signed by a women's trade union. Although the complainant had lost the case because the specific petition made by her had failed on a technicality, the Supreme Court had nevertheless ruled that the collective agreement signed by the women's trade union was incompatible with the equal pay legislation in force at the

time. The second complaint had been lodged at the beginning of the 1980s by a woman who claimed she had been paid less than her male colleague for identical work. As, at the time, the burden of proof rested with the complainant, the woman had lost the case because the Supreme Court had ruled that she had provided no evidence of discrimination, given the different responsibilities assigned to each worker. At present, the Supreme Court was seized of a case which related not to wages but to the reasons why an administrative body had recruited a man over a woman, and it had to decide whether the choice had been based on sex or not.

63. With regard to the participation of women in politics, women were undeniably very active. They were conversant with the law and each case of discrimination was widely publicized by the media. For all that, more and more attention was undoubtedly being paid to women.

64. The Women's List was a relatively new political movement, set up in 1982. In addition to the votes the movement received in some elections, its very existence had helped increase the participation of women as traditional political parties had felt under pressure. The increase in the number of women serving on local councils and in Parliament was undeniably due to the movement's activities.

65. Wage disparities were probably due more to the nature of women's work than traditional exploitation. The overwhelming majority of women worked part-time and did not consider themselves as the family breadwinner. However, they were increasingly likely to work full-time and hold positions of responsibility; that would inevitably improve the overall situation with regard to wage equality.

66. Mrs. JIMENEZ BOUTRAGUEÑO asked whether it was still possible for a collective agreement to set a different wage scale for men and for women.

67. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) replied that under the act promulgated in 1961 it was categorically forbidden to set different wage scales for men and women.

68. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Iceland to reply to the questions in the list of issues dealing with article 6 (the right to work).

69. Mr. KRISTINSSON (Iceland) stated that the employment situation in the 1980s had been favourable, with an unemployment rate of only 1 per cent, rising to 1.5 per cent in 1989-1991. Increases in seasonal unemployment (approximately 2 to 3.5 per cent) were registered from 1970 especially during the first quarter, peaking in January. At that time, the Icelandic labour market had been characterized more by a shortage of labour than of jobs, and unemployment had therefore been for the most part seasonal. Therefore, there had been no need to take measures which could have harmed vulnerable or underprivileged groups. It should be pointed out that in 1990, foreigners accounted for only 1.9 per cent of the total population, and that half of them had come from other Nordic countries. The situation of prosperity had changed and 6,500 jobs had been lost since 1987 and 800 other full-time jobs were due to disappear in 1993. In 1992, Iceland had registered an average unemployment rate of 3 per cent, the highest since the period from 1968 to 1970 and a figure which although low by comparison with other countries was none the less

worrying. The tide had turned mainly as a result of a more difficult economic situation, which was partly explained by seasonal unemployment, particularly in the south-west of the island where in December 1992 the rate had bordered on 9 per cent. Unemployment had been abnormally high in the capital area which was usually far more prosperous than other regions of the country. Only the region of the Western Fjords had maintained an unemployment rate of approximately 1 per cent, the lowest in the country. Elsewhere, the rates had generally reached a record high since 1970 and an average of 4.5 was predicted for 1993, corresponding to 5,500 people unemployed. In 1992, the percentage of women unemployed stood at 3.8 as opposed to 2.6 for men. There were no figures available on unemployment broken down according to age group. The 1993 budget provided for special financial contributions from local authorities to the Unemployment Insurance Fund, totalling Krona 500 million, to increase the job supply. Local authorities which suggested measures to encourage employment could receive grants under the fund to put their proposals into practice.

70. The CHAIRPERSON said that at the 30th meeting, the Committee would continue with Iceland's replies to the written questions on article 6 of the Covenant.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.